Of Artichokes & No MUOS

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stories of anti-militarist struggles in Niscemi and Sicily

By Pino Peps

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Niscemi bedda, Niscemi mia, / My beautiful Niscemi
Cc'è cu lotta, e cu talìa. / There are fighters, and bystanders.

We fight against three giants my dear Sancho:
injustice, fear and ignorance.

Automated global warfare, colonialism, neoliberalism and the mafia-state are the modern Four Horsemen of the Sicilian Apocalypse, always riding together in their constant attempt to destroy and conquer everything that exists freely outside their logic, on this island as elsewhere. They bring invasions, military occupations and environmental devastation, rob local economies of all resources and wealth, drastically impoverishing the native populations and forcing them either to submit or to flee and emigrate. Standard bearer and apotheosis of all this, the *Mobile User Objective System* (MUOS), fully embodies the monstrosity of this project, whose purpose is surveillance, control and finally the total conquest of the existing on a planetary scale through a permanent and global war. The history of this monster of modernity that occupies Niscemi (Caltanissetta) is so paradigmatic and symbolic of the reality of this new millennium that it can be seen as a prism, which allows us, based on the angle from which we look at it, to observe different phenomena and

how they intertwine with each other: Sicily and its strategic military importance at an international geopolitical level; the classic dynamics of opportunistic servility of every Italian government to the US diktat; mafia infiltration in Italy-USA-Sicily economic and military projects; the plundering and extractivism of territories and countryside in the name of capitalist progress; the imperialist and colonial role of the USA on the island and in the Mediterranean as a global key.

After 2001, in fact, the military strategy of the United States and NATO took on a permanent character, oriented not only to planetary surveillance but also to the projection of their hegemony through an increasing automation and continuation of conflicts on a global scale. Through the *forward basing system*, Washington has over 5,000 installations worldwide, employing more than 270,000 military personnel, of which 80,000 between Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy (12,500). The Mediterranean represents a key area in this network, extending from the Azores to Turkey and involving all the nations of the northern and southern shores. Sicily, in particular, plays an essential strategic role for the control and access to South-West Asia (a preferable nomenclature to refer to the so-called "Middle East" to avoid the Orientalist language of Western origin and obsolete colonial heritage) and Africa. This global military infrastructure allows for unprecedented operational speed, making geographical distance an almost irrelevant factor thanks to the logistical efficiency and capillarity of the bases. In Italy, there are four main NATO facilities: the research center in La Spezia, the Defense College in Rome, the Naples Command and the naval base in Taranto. More than 120 American bases (among which the location of some is secret) are distributed throughout the country: from Aviano and Ghedi, belonging to the US Air Force and equipped with nuclear warheads, to Camp Ederle and Camp Darby for the army, down to Gaeta and Naples for the navy and the NATO command. In Sicily, Sigonella is the hub of US air and naval operations in the Mediterranean, hence the exemplary nickname “hub of the Med”, hosting drones for surveillance and targeted attacks, flanked by the Augusta naval base, which houses heavy weaponry and nuclear-capable submarines. The strong American military presence on the island has been the subject of political tensions and popular protests for many decades, while the United States Sixth Fleet continues to operate steadily in the Mediterranean. The question that arises then is: why and since when have there been so many US military bases in Italy and Sicily?

From the infamous invasion landing of the Anglo-Americans in 1943 (Operation Husky) until today, the Yankees have done nothing but increase their grip and presence on the land of Trinacria, occupying, expropriating, devastating, building and disseminating the territory with military installations of all kinds: ports and airports, shooting ranges, weapons and ammunition depots (several abandoned or secret), telecommunications stations and centers, roads and railways for military use, land and sea vehicles, submarines, aircraft, fighter-bombers, drones, and, last but not least, the flagship of the US-NATO military machine in the Mediterranean, the NASSIG bases in Sigonella and the NRTF-MUOS in Niscemi. These two structures, of vital importance for the *'mmiricani* (yankees) interests, must be analyzed together to better understand the reasons for such a widespread militarization on the island and the highly harmful consequences on the population and the environment affected by them. Within a brief historical-introductory framework of the scourge of Italy-EU-USA-NATO militarization in the Mediterranean and in Sicily, our intention is to illustrate the critical issues that arise at an environmental, socio-economic, health, political, human and infrastructural level, for which the local community always pays the price. On the other hand, however, we must not forget that for more than forty years the Sicilian population has been opposed, in various ways, to all these military, colonial, mafia and similar projects, and that many people have fought and died to denounce and fight against these monstrous war titans made of metal and gunpowder. It is important to talk about them too, so that our rebellious memory does not fade away and reminds us that, if on the one hand it is true that we have to fight with ruthless giants, apparently unreachable and unbeatable, on the other hand it is equally true that the Sicilian people have always forged the history of their island as protagonists, fighting for their land and freedom against any foreign domination or military-colonizing power of the moment.

A brief history of the US military presence in the Mediterranean and Sicily

Since the times before history, Sicily has continuously been a crossroads traversed by cultures and populations from every corner of the Mediterranean and neighboring continents. Its perfect centrality between North and South, East and West, has brought over the centuries not only much wealth and diversity, both material and socio-cultural, but has also gene-

rated a very terrible fate: to be desired by every military power that overlooked the shores of the sea between the lands. The encounter, the clash and the countless social, economic, political and cultural interactions between profoundly different realities have generated hybridization and heterogeneity unique in the Mediterranean world. Starting with Elymians, Sicans, Sicels and Phoenicians, from Greek colonization (Megale Hellas) to the Punic wars and Roman domination, from the "barbarian" invasions after the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Arab conquest, then passing hands between the Normans, Swabians, Angevins and Aragonese, (including the Vespers and the European war between the papacy, France and Aragon for hegemony over Sicily and the Mediterranean), under the Bourbons and the British, until the Expedition of the Thousand and the annexation to the Italian kingdom led by the kingdom of Savoy, this island has always been essential for anyone aspiring to control the entire *Mediterranean sea-world* and obtain privileged access to wealth, resources and trade routes that are decisive at an international and global level.

The U.S. military presence in Sicily comes chronologically as the last one and is relatively recent (about eighty years now), but it has been able to upend the island and its inhabitants as other states had never been able to do in the past. Sicily, despite the constraints of demilitarization imposed by the Treaties of Paris of 1947, is today one of the most militarized regions of the Mediterranean. Its strategic positioning has made the island a central node of the US-NATO military network, with infrastructures covering the entire territory, from the coasts to the inland areas, up to the smaller islands. Among the most significant installations are, as already mentioned, the Sigonella base, a central nerve for surveillance, intelligence and the use of armed drones, and the NRTF-MUOS base in Niscemi, in the heart of the Sughereta (cork oak) natural reserve, which hosts a satellite communications system for geostrategic reasons. with very high radio and electromagnetic waves and to the detriment of the Niscemese population and local agriculture. Militarization also extends to other places of high naturalistic value, such as Punta Bianca and Punta Izzo, formally natural reserves but still subject to military servitude. Similar attempts have been made also in the Madonie mountains, where the proposal for a military hub was met with resistance from local communities. The smaller islands – Lampedusa, Pantelleria, Egadi and Pelagie – are used for radars, airports and logistics facilities, with negative repercussions on the environment and public health. This complex system of

military occupation should be understood as a colonial effort, which poisons and devastates the population and territory, prevents the economic and social development of the island and deprives it of autonomy and freedom.

The beginning of the US military presence in the Mediterranean, on the other hand, dates back to the late eighteenth century. In 1796, in fact, the British Empire decided to suspend the maritime protection of the Royal Navy, thus leaving the young american state alone to deal with the varied pirate reality of the so-called "Barbary States" of North Africa, which had an easy time assaulting yankee merchant ships, kidnapping and demanding ransoms, or imposing taxes for safe passage in pirate waters. Faced with such humiliations by both pirates and European nations, and aware of the importance of securing free and stable trade routes, Jefferson preferred a large-scale military intervention, in the usual american "muscular" way, sending two-thirds of the entire U.S. Navy to defend U.S. merchant vessels in the Mediterranean. Predictably, the first conflict beyond its national borders took place exactly in those waters, against the State of Tripoli on the occasion of the first and second Barbary Wars, 1801-1805 and 1815, alongside other European powers (battles whose memories echo even in the anthem of the Marines of the early twentieth century). It is also necessary to take into account, on the domestic side, the decisive role on an imperialist level (and deterrence against potential European interference) of the Monroe doctrine from 1823 onwards for hegemony over the rest of the American continent, seen as its own backyard and exclusive hunting ground, also affirmed by the decisive victory in the battle of Chapulltepec (1847) in the Mexican-American War.

Having acquired and consolidated control (direct and indirect) of the American internal front, expanding into the Mediterranean became even more important for the United States, as French colonization in Algeria since 1830 had put an end to piracy and the North African Barbary states, and the inauguration of the Suez Canal (1869) had given new centrality to this sea (supplanted by Atlantic traffic since the fifteenth century) on a global scale. The presence of the US Navy's *Mediterranean Squadron* was now a fact, it served to visibly demonstrate the US military entity and power on the other side of the world as well. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, moreover, the industrial revolution allowed an exponential growth and multidimensional military expansion (both for the European colonial states and the US) thanks to the continuous technological

innovation of the war and logistics apparatus, assisted by the omnipresent draft in all Western states. These nefarious processes of militarization and blind arms race culminated in the carnage of the First World War, after which the balance of international power began to shift progressively in favor of the US, which largely profited from the conflict, without territorial damage at home unlike the European continent, and constantly growing in every sector, first and foremost the war industry.

With the Second World War, this transfer of power was definitively sealed. During the conflict, in fact, the United States expanded its network of military bases globally, reaching remote areas such as Greenland and Iceland, Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico and Ecuador, up to the Azores, as a strategic outpost from a Mediterranean perspective. This was made possible by the fact that the United States was able to lend arms worth a total of over 40 million dollars to those states considered essential for the defense of its interests. In doing so, they were able to circumvent the proclaimed doctrine of neutrality elaborated by Franklin D. Roosevelt through a simple *give-and-take:* the right to use the land for military bases in exchange for war products on loan – rather than being directly sold. To give some illustrative figures, there were only 14 military installations outside the U.S. territory in 1938, while already in 1945 they amounted to 30,000. Although this dizzying number had dropped to 2,000 in 1948, the significant fact is that the global extension of these bases, a direct result of the Second World War, was the springboard towards the rise to global hegemony of the United States in the second half of the twentieth century during the Cold War.

The year 1943 was decisive both for the fate of the conflict and for Sicily, which, exhausted and starved by fascist war policies and bombed by the Anglo-Americans in view of the landing, found itself again to be the keystone for the resolution of a geopolitically crucial military conflict. From Operation Husky onwards, the conquest and occupation (initially thought of as a transitional war phase) of the island allowed the United States to establish the first temporary military bases for subsequent operations in Italy and the Mediterranean, including Sigonella, Augusta, Trapani and other support installations. From a strategic-political point of view, the rapid Allied victory in Sicily chained a fatal series of events for the Italian scenario, as Mussolini was ousted directly by the Grand Council, the fascist regime thus collapsed on itself, and the Italian kingdom came to sign the armistice of Cassibile, all within a few months (from July

to September). On the Mediterranean side, parallel to the end of the war, oil was discovered in the Arabian Peninsula and from 1945 massive and systematic extraction began by both European states and the USA. Adding the crucial role of the Suez Canal for world trade, it is clear that both the Mediterranean region and Southwest Asia were considered as inseparable elements of a single great geopolitical scenario. For Washington, rooting its presence in the entire region was therefore essential to ensure hegemony from an anti-Soviet perspective.

In the years immediately following the conflict, in fact, the United States reconfigured its military presence in view of the new world political-economic order through the famous Truman doctrine, in which Sicily and the Mediterranean found themselves to be the new center of the clash between the dominant models of "civilization", between Soviet communism (although it is questionable whether that regime was really communist, but then again, this is not the place for such analyses) and US capitalism. In this bipolar global context, the fate of the island of Trinacria was now exclusively in the hands of the United States and the forces of the newborn North Atlantic Treaty. During the 1950s and 1960s, NATO committed to strengthening its facilities in Sicily, with Sigonella (built in 1959) becoming a regional and global hub for aerial and intelligence operations in the Mediterranean, North Africa and Southwest Asia. New military infrastructures were built, such as hangars, logistics and ammunition depots, radars and communication systems throughout the island. The militarization of the island grew in tandem with the exacerbation of Cold War tensions and various global war scenarios. Even in the most remote conflict zones on the planet, the role of Sigonella in the first place and of the entire Sicilian island as a US military infrastructure was always in the forefront, both for supplies and logistics and for organizing entire operations (the napalm that was used in Vietnam, for example, often passed through Sigonella).

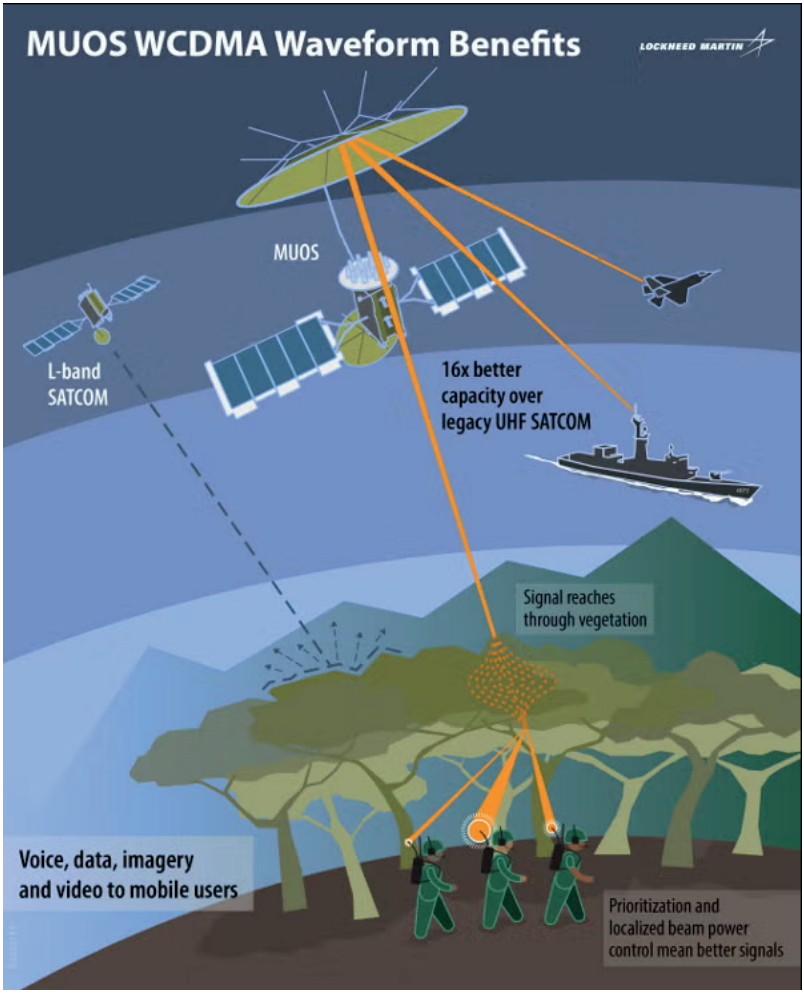
Continuing in the seventies and eighties, the military presence intensified, expanding and modernizing through the introduction of new technologies and structures, including air defense systems and advanced communications. And it is then that Comiso came into play, whose fame from the post-war period until today is mainly linked to the history of the airport and the anti-militarist, pacifist, environmentalist and anti-nuclear movements that opposed it for several years. On August 7, 1981, in fact, the Italian government led by Spadolini approved the installation of a NATO

base in the former Comiso airport, intended to accommodate 112 "Cruise" missiles with nuclear warheads. The Sicilian town thus found itself, from one day to the next, at the center of tensions and interests of international relevance, attracting numerous exponents of national politics. Giacomo Cagnes, former mayor and prominent figure of the PCI, took the lead of the local protests against the installation of the missiles, while the municipal administration, led by Salvatore Catalano, sided in favor of the government decision. Pio La Torre intervened several times to support and strengthen the pacifist movement. Not only institutional figures, but also heterogeneous elements of civil society, such as the journalist Giuseppe Fava (killed in 1984 by the Catania mafia for his inconvenient work of denunciation) and many other "ordinary people" of the population took an active part in these protests. On April 4, 1982, a large national demonstration was held in Comiso that brought together over 100,000 people from all over Italy, united by the ideas of anti-militarism and pacifism. In the same year, work began on the construction of the base, and on May 5, 1983, the first 225 American soldiers arrived. During the summer of the same year, tensions between militants and cops increased considerably: many activists, who had camped in the grounds surrounding the airport, were injured or arrested during the clashes. For several years there were protests, initiatives, struggles and demonstrations in which an entire Sicilian generation (and not only) was formed in rebellious and libertarian practices and ideas that combined anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism and anti-militarism into a great dream of freedom. All this lasted until 1986, when the camps set up by the movements began to be dismantled. Against the background of these events, we must not forget the episode known as the Italy-USA "Sigonella crisis" between Craxi and Reagan in 1985 linked to the Achille Lauro cruise and the extradition of Abu Abbas, significant of the international importance of Sicily even during the most tense years of the Cold War. In general, the overall situation began to relax also thanks to political changes at the international level, since the rise of Mikhail Gorbačëv inaugurated a new phase of diplomatic relations between the two world superpowers. This process culminated in 1987 with the signing of the agreement between Reagan and Gorbachev for the reduction of Euromissiles, which sanctioned the dismantling of all European nuclear bases within a decade, including that of Comiso. Finally, in 1991, the last battery of "Cruise" missiles left the city, closing a significant chapter in Sicilian history and its fight against imperialist militarism.

It is important to underline that those years of struggles were formative

and fundamental also for the fate of the future Sicilian anti-militarist movement that would be born in Niscemi against the MUOS in the following decades. In the years following the Cold War, the NRTF base in Niscemi (*Naval Radio Transmitter Facility*) was developed as a strategic node for communications and the command of US and NATO forces, maintaining a central role despite geopolitical changes. The end of the bipolar conflict led to a redefinition of military strategies, but the installations in Sicily — in particular Sigonella — continued to be fundamental for operations in the Balkans, South West Asia and Africa. Between 2000 and 2010, the global MUOS project was born and the intention to further update and automate all world bases, specifically in view of the new "global war on terrorism" marked by the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, strengthening cooperation between Italy, the United States and NATO through joint trainings and infrastructure modernization.

In the last decade, the international military presence has also grown in the field of surveillance of the Mediterranean in the fight against migratory flows from postcolonial countries, justified by the fight against terrorism and human trafficking, including NATO, US, Italian and Israeli joint formations and training. Sigonella, the capital of drones, and Niscemi are in fact today more than ever central to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations (ISR), satellite communications and bombing attacks in ongoing conflicts, thanks above all to Niscemi's MUOS system, fully operational since 2019. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sigonella has taken on a leading role in monitoring the Black Sea: it is from here that the US drone that sank the cruiser Moskva (one of the most decisive naval battles of the conflict so far) took off. The base is also actively involved in the Israeli genocide against the Palestinian population in Gaza and Lebanon, as it is from Sigonella that the latest generation Northrop Grumman RQ-4 Global Hawk killer drones–euphemistically defined as *remotely piloted aircraft*, RPA, also often referred to as UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle)–are deployed, constantly bombing the entire region.


MUOS WCDMA Waveform Benefits
LOCKHEED MARTIN
MUOS
L-band
SATCOM
16x better
capacity over
legacy UHF SATCOM
Signal reaches
through vegetation
Voice, data, imagery
and video to mobile users
Prioritization and
localized beam power
control mean better signals

Cacoccioli VS US Army: stories and the NO MUOS fight in NISCEMI

When I think of Niscemi, my maternal town materializes in my mind through two vivid symbolic and sensory elements: the *cacoccioli* (artichokes in sicilian dialect) and the NO MUOS movement. Locally, Niscemi is known as the capital of the violet artichoke, of which there is also a famous spring festival. The territory on which this town of just over 24,000 inhabitants stands has in fact always had a fair amount of importance from an agricultural point of view. The town stands at 332 meters above sea level on a hill of the Erei Mountains, overlooking the Plain of Gela with a magnificent panoramic view that extends to the sea, and the etymology of its name derives, in all likelihood, from the Arabic مَشْنَ *Neshem*/ ةَمَشْنَ *Neshemeh*, that is, elm, a tree of which the entire area is rich. The clayey soil rich in tuff also makes it an area highly sensitive to landslides and earthquakes (various earthquakes over the centuries have reshaped the face and destiny of the village). Outside of the island and the national anti-militarist networks, however, the existence of Niscemi and the stories linked to this territory are almost completely unknown. It is part of that removed collective knowledge linked to the South and Sicily that the propaganda of the Italian state has every interest in masking, downsizing and erasing. In addition to talking about MUOS, therefore, I think it is first important to mention the unique historical legacy of Niscemi, to provide an introductory background necessary to keep the memory alive and to remind us that our history cannot and must not be defined exclusively by colonial relations with the *yankees*, that our past has ancestral and mythological roots far older than the existence of the United States of America themselves.

The first traces of human settlements in the Niscemese area date back to the Neolithic, between the third and second millennium BC, as evidenced by the numerous oven tombs dug into the rock in the area. During the Metal Ages, the territory was inhabited by Sican communities dedicated to hunting, sheep farming and the production of ceramics and tools. In the thirteenth century BC, necropolises and fortified villages of the Bronze Age developed, probably in response to the pressure of the Sicels. In Greek times, the settlers of Gela intensified agriculture in the area, while in the late Roman period the area was assigned to the patrician Calvisio, becoming the *Plaga Calvisiana*. The village prospered until the arrival of the Arabs, who destroyed it in the ninth century. Later, the Arabs themselves founded a fortified village on the hill of the current city, calling it *Fata-nashim* ("elm pass", then shortened to *Nashiam*), and introduced profound transformations in the land and agricultural regime. However, in the twelfth

century, the village was razed to the ground again during the conflicts between Muslims and Normans. Refounded from scratch for the umpteenth time in 1143, it took the official latinized name of *Nixenum*, becoming a rustic fiefdom, and passing, after various changes, into the hands of the Branciforte nobles-descended from Piacenza (Lombardy) to Sicily in 1324.

The foundation of the modern urban center is linked to the popular legend of the shepherd Andrea Armao, who in 1599 found his ox *Portagioia* kneeling in front of an image of the Madonna in the woods of Castellana, next to a spring. The discovery was interpreted as a divine sign and led to the birth of the cult of Maria Santissima del Bosco, (holy Mary of the forest) patron saint of the city. In 1624, the noblewoman Giovanna Branciforte obtained the *licentia populandi* (authorization to settlement) to officially populate the fiefdom, founding the barony of Niscemi. Two years later, his son Joseph received the title of Prince, confirmed by King Philip IV of Spain. The village took on a new urban structure with a central square and a Mother Church, maintained even after the earthquake of 1693 which, although damaging the town, did not cause casualties. Another major seismic event struck the area in 1790: a devastating telluric movement accompanied by cracks in the ground, heat and foul-smelling vapors greatly frightened the population and caused the formation of a small volcanic cone, lasting eight days.

During the nineteenth century and the Unification of Italy, Niscemi was the scene of various political ferments: King Ferdinand II visited the city in 1838 complaining about the bad roads (a situation tragicomically still found today); in January 1848 Niscemi also took part in the anti-Bourbon insurrection with Salvatore Masaracchio as commander of the National Guard, and in 1860 the town joined the Expedition of the Thousand, hosting the Garibaldians and voting for annexation to the Kingdom of Italy. Masaracchio, who became mayor, was assassinated in 1864 by Matteo Di Benedetto, son of the brigand *Parachiazza*, known for his actions in the post-unification countryside. In 1891 Niscemi was the second Sicilian town, after Catania, where the Fascio dei Lavoratori (league of workers) was founded, which obtained in 1897 the allotment, assignment and redistribution of former feudal state lands to the peasants.

Nevertheless, the twentieth century was marked by further social tensions and political violence: in 1922 the socialist Salvatore Noto was killed by fascist squads in the central square in front of the mother church, and between the two world wars thefts and robberies multiplied, mainly due to total unemployment and the rampant misery in which the population was forced. To cope with this extreme poverty, numerous laborers and peasants united again in collective organizations

to demand the allocation of the land that had remained unproductive. During and after the Second World War, the notorious "Banda dei Niscemesi", led by Rosario Avila (known as *Canaluni*) and Salvatore Rizzo – characters known to the people of whom my grandmother and my aunts still tell us stories – was responsible for numerous crimes, including the killing of eight carabinieri. Avila was found dead in 1946, and the gang was quickly defeated. The social unrest and economic difficulties that had marked the interwar period also recurred in the post-war period: in 1947, over four thousand workers took part in a demonstration that resulted in riots, acts of expropriation or looting and violent police repression. The mobilizations continued for a few more years, but gradually petered out until 1951, when many of those workers, discouraged by the lack of prospects, decided to emigrate abroad - there are various communities of Niscemese in Germany even today - or to other Italian regions in search of a better future, the common destiny of the Sicilian population in those years.

In 1997 a landslide hit the Sante Croci district, with the church of the same name collapsed down to the valley, damaging dozens of homes and causing the displacement of over a hundred families; Compensation arrived only in 2011. Finally, in the 90s and 2000s, Niscemi ended up in the spotlight again for mafia infiltration in the municipal administration, which led to the commissioning of the institution in 1992 and 2003. These events testify to a long, complex and unique socio-political history, made up of continuous resistance, renewal and struggle against the established order, both by revolutionary crowds of peasants and, sometimes, even through a certain rural banditry that should not be idealized. In this long and deep historical furrow, the USA entered the scene only at the last minute, for just over thirty years, but managed to damage the territory and the health of the local population to levels never reached before.

Niscemi is today the battleground between local communities and global strategic interests. In the Sughereta (about 3,000 hectares), the last strip of what was once the largest cork forest in central-southern Sicily, a protected natural area and SIC (site of communitarian interest), stands the imposing US military infrastructure that we have already mentioned several times: the MUOS (Mobile User Objective System). This territory, already marked by the devastating effects of the pollution produced for decades by the petrochemical hub of Gela – killing fish in the sea and the population with genetic malformations and very high cancer incidences – has once again found itself under pressure: on the one hand, an impoverished social context, affected by unemployment, youth migration and lack of essential services; on the other, one of the most advanced war communication structures ever built by the United States in Europe. This sophisticated

satellite telecommunication system is part of the NRTF, operational since 1991 and is among the largest in Italy. It occupies an area of about 1,660,000 square meters of mainly wooded and agricultural territory, formally transferred to the State Property – Air Force section – in September 1988, following the purchase of the land from the company Olmo S.p.A. of Catania. It serves to ensure the continuous and secure flow of data between the different operational units – surface, submarine, land and air – and the C4I (Command, Control, Computer, Communications and Intelligence) structures.

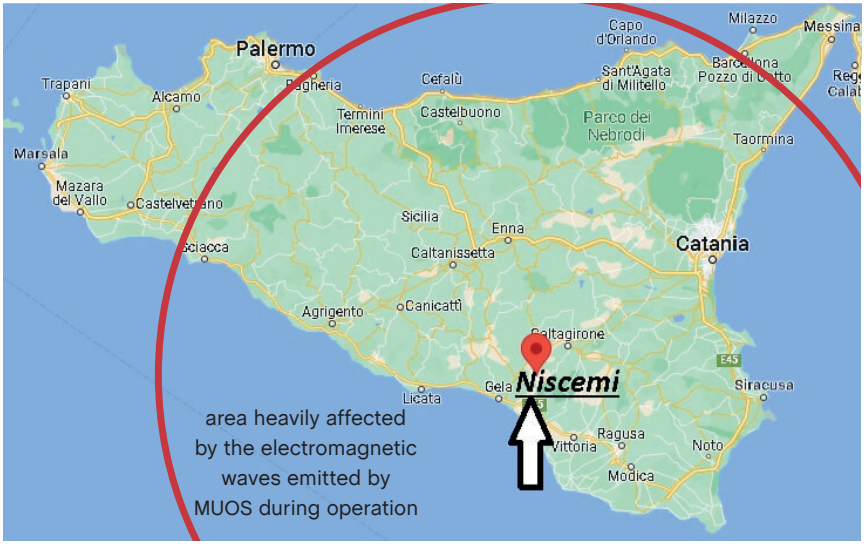
The infrastructure is "for the exclusive use of the armed forces of the United States", which involves "the use of the infrastructure by the armed forces of a single nation, for the performance of activities related to the mission and/or tasks assigned to said force by the State that sent it", as established by the technical agreement signed in Rome in 2006 between the Italian Ministry of Defense and the United States Department of Defense. The table attached to the agreement lists the assets permanently supplied to the USA at the Niscemi base, including: the transmission system and microwave antenna, the Helix House building with low-frequency (LF) antenna, a warehouse, a fire protection facility, an electronic maintenance workshop, a water tank and 37 HF antennas for high-frequency communications. The Niscemi site manages a wide range of radio frequencies, from 30 MHz to 3000 MHz (Ultra and Very High Frequency – UHF and VHF), typically used for communications with aircraft and satellites, up to extremely low and very low frequencies (ELF, VLF, LF, between 300 Hz and 300 kHz), the only ones capable of crossing oceans and communicating with deep-diving nuclear submarines. In 2006, an additional integrated automatic reception and transmission system, called ISABPS (*Integrated Submarine Automated Broadcast Processing System*), was also installed in Niscemi. This system enables the complete management of low-frequency communications with strategic submarines under the Atlantic Low Frequency Submarine Broadcast program, further strengthening Niscemi's role in the U.S. global military communications network.

A global network developed by the U.S. Department of Defense to ensure fast, encrypted and stable communications to the U.S. armed forces deployed in every corner of the planet. Indicative is the fact that the MUOS worldwide project, born in the early 2000s, is in the hands of Lockheed Martin. The land terminal in Niscemi consists of three gigantic disks of 18 meters in diameter and two UHF antennas, and is connected to a constellation of geostationary satellites that allow the instant exchange of data between central command and operational units moving around the globe: drones, ships, submarines, land and air vehicles. The terminal is the fourth center of its kind in the world – the others are located in Australia,

Virginia and Hawaii – and assumes a strategic centrality in the Euro-Mediterranean theater, in particular for military operations in Africa, the South Asia and Eastern Europe. The MUOS replaced the previous UFO system, providing a more advanced infrastructure for C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Informatics, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) activities.

The troubled bureaucratic process for the necessary authorizations has gone hand in hand with institutional and popular protests for years. In principle, the request to install one of the MUOS terminals in Sicily was made by the US embassy to the Ministry of Defense on September 27, 2005. Initially planned for the Sigonella base, the project was then moved to Niscemi following a study (Sicily RADHAZ Model) that reported the danger of the emissions for the explosives present in Sigonella. The new location was presented to the Regional Department of Territory and Environment in January 2007 and obtained approval in 2008, despite being located in a natural reserve. These top-down decisions confirm once again how the oppressive intentions of foreign superpowers trample on and overdetermine everything they want to conquer, regardless of either the environmental impacts or the potential danger to the life and health of the population. Inevitably, therefore, objections were raised right from the start: the Municipality of Niscemi asked ARPA Sicilia for verifications, highlighting deficiencies in the data provided by the US Navy and little collaboration in the technical tables. In 2011, despite the fact that ARPA had stressed the impossibility of carrying out reliable assessments due to lack of information, the regional government – led by Raffaele Lombardo – signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Defense authorizing the project. At the basis of this decision, a favorable opinion signed by two professors of the University of Palermo (Luigi Zanforlin and Patrizia Livreri), who judged the terminal not harmful to health. Faced with the usual institutional intrigues, this apologetic position was countered by the independent study by Massimo Zucchetti and Massimo Coraddu of the Polytechnic University of Turin, which highlighted serious gaps in official measurements, underestimation of the impact and potential direct damage to human health and the environment. The report also pointed to risks to air traffic and wildlife, particularly birds and bees, which are subjected to lethal or debilitating effects due to electromagnetic waves.

In the following years there were numerous blockages to the works, often withdrawn within a short time. A significant example is the seizure of the terminal ordered in October 2012 by the Public Prosecutor's Office of Caltagirone, a measure then annulled within two weeks by the Court of Freedom of Catania. Particularly well-known, then, is the story of the so-called "revocation of the



revocation" which took place in 2013 at the hands of Rosario Crocetta. On that occasion, the then President of the Region revoked the authorization, but at the same time started a discussion with the national government in order to submit the project to a new Environmental Impact Assessment, to be entrusted to a third-party technical body, subsequently found in the Istituto Superiore di Sanità. The latter minimized the risks, arguing: "no risks due to the known effects of electromagnetic fields are foreseeable, and even in the unlikely hypothesis of a pointing of the parabolic antennas at ground level, or in any case in the directions of people who could be exposed to the main beam, it is believed that these risks can be considered completely negligible". Again, these were hasty and unreliable assessments, whose only real purpose was to force the green light for the works. Crocetta, on the basis of this pseudo-scientific opinion, with a hypocritical and fanciful move, and under pressure from the US ambassador that visited him in secret, revoked his own revocation and authorized the resumption of the work. It is no coincidence that the same TAR Sicily then canceled the ISS report, agreeing with those who opposed the MUOS and giving new life to the disputes. Despite all this, works continued and in 2014 they were largely completed, with the terminal becoming fully operational only in November 2016, (then updated and optimized until 2019) after years of litigation and demonstrations. The installation of this facility represented, for many, yet another demonstration of the US directive to transform Sicily into a "stars-and-stripes aircraft carrier" at any cost and against all common sense or popular will, in order to export the so-called "Western democracy" through weapons and intelligence.

In parallel with the institutional procedures, the NO MUOS Movement has built one

of the largest and most articulated popular mobilizations in the recent history of the island. Born in 2009 as a spontaneous reaction of citizens and local associations, the movement has been able to expand into a regional and national network, connecting with anti-militarist struggles in other parts of Italy and the Mediterranean – NO TAV, NO PONTE, NO TAP and many others. The mobilization against the MUOS took shape as early as 2008 with the Campaign for the demilitarization of Sigonella. On February 25, 2009, the NO MUOS Citizen Committee was born in Niscemi, and a few days later it organized its first demonstration in which thousands of people took part. The movement expanded to include committees, mayors, schools, associations, and a wide social spectrum. Key moments were the establishment of the permanent *presidio* (October 2012), the birth of the NO MUOS Mothers' Committees and disruptive actions such as the blockade of military convoys or the occupation of the base (climbing on some antennas) and the Sicilian Regional Assembly. Despite the obstacles, the movement managed to slow down the work several times and influence the decisions of the authorities. In 2015, the TAR accepted the appeals of the committees and annulled the authorizations, but a few months later the Italian Ministry of Defense overturned the sentence. The decision was confirmed by the Supreme Court in 2017. In the following years, the authorities intensified judicial repression: hundreds of activists were tried, and in November 2022, seventeen protesters were convicted for acts related to a 2014 protest. However, the battle did not end: a few days after that sentence, the Palermo Regional Administrative Court condemned the Ministry of Defense for illegally granting works to strengthen the MUOS.

Niscemi remains an emblematic case of our present history: on the one hand, the technological and military prsence of a global superpower; on the other, a community that, despite social and geographical marginalization, has been able to build one of the most determined civil resistances in contemporary Italy and the NO MUOS Movement represents a fundamental experience of struggle for Sicily. The most significant initiatives include various actions and practices of struggle tested over the years and still part of the heritage of NO MUOS resistance: popular assemblies in the squares; the permanent garrisons near the base; large mass demonstrations (up to 20,000 participants); direct actions such as the blockade of military trucks or raids on construction sites; summer and winter “camps of resistance”; a constant work of counter-information, through conferences, public meetings, documentaries, independent studies and editorial productions. The movement also has the merit of bringing the issues of territorial sovereignty, health safety, environmental protection and the right to self-determination of peoples back to the center of the public debate. In a context in which Sicily has become a real theater of war between geopolitical powers, the opposition to the

MUOS has managed to catalyze a collective consciousness that has united students, farmers, doctors, engineers, activists, the elderly and youth in a common battle against the transformation of the island into a permanent war base.

Finally, although it may seem like a trite slogan, it is true that only "peoples in revolt write history", and that we must always be "NO MUOS until victory" if we want to hope to really change our current fate towards a better future.

To Euno,
rebellious slave, herald of freedom,
and to all peoples
who rebelled
And fought for their freedom
On this island as much *bedda (beautiful)* as it is *mischina (miserable)*.

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